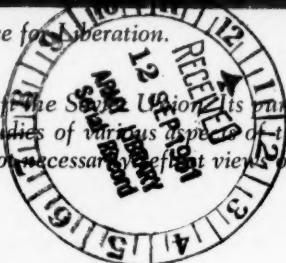


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No. 46, 1960/61

THE COMING OF THE BERLIN CRISIS AND THE MOOD OF THE SOVIET PEOPLE

Aware of the serious consequences of their decision to seal off West Berlin, the Soviets have felt called upon to cover their act of violence with a stream of vituperation, charging that the Western forepost has become a nest of spies.

The Soviet campaign to aggravate the tense situation in Berlin hit a high note on August 3, with the Soviet rejection of All-German elections and of possible reunification.

The game of aggravation gradually worsened when the Party secretaries of the Warsaw Pact countries declared that they were behind the current tough policy, and when Premier Khrushchev in his television "chat" warned that war would not leave the homes of the American people unscathed.

In a subsequent speech, Khrushchev vowed that in the event of war, Soviet bombs would rain also on N. A. T. O. bases "situated among the citrus orchards of Italy and among the olive groves of Greece."

A harbinger of the tightening ring around West Berlin was the appointment of Marshal Konev as commander of a special Soviet force in East Germany.

The sealing off of West Berlin was followed by the publication of an obviously faked statement by the Warsaw Pact governments, justifying the step. The Soviet press reflected intense nervousness within the Kremlin. The Soviet leaders apparently decided to lie low for a while and the daily press tried to outdo itself with reports of peaceful conditions in Berlin. These distorted reports were necessitated by a trend in the Soviet populace to reject the idea of war. Especially the youth were immune of it. The Soviet

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THE COMING OF THE BERLIN CRISIS AND THE MOOD OF THE SOVIET PEOPLE

In recent weeks Soviet policy of deliberate aggravation of conditions in West Berlin has run aground of difficulties. When the Communists closed the West Berlin border, the Soviets felt called upon to justify this act of violence by charging, in an arrogant but defensive reply to the Allied protest note, that "West Berlin has been turned into a center of subversion, sabotage, and espionage, a center of political and economic provocation against the German Democratic Republic, the Soviet Union, and the other socialist countries. . ." (Izvestia, August 19, 1961).

In their attempt to blame the West for the border closing, the Soviets climactically complained that "things reached such a point where West Berlin became the residence of the so-called 'American Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia'" (ibid.).

West Berlin, the note claimed further, has become "the main base for persistent economic sabotage of the German Democratic Republic," draining it of valuable goods and foodstuffs and exporting them to West Berlin. The absurdity of this statement will be obvious to anyone at all familiar with the true situation in East Germany. Opportunities to purchase "valuable" goods are nonexistent there, foodstuffs in free circulation are scarce, and citizens at least until recently, had to shop in West Berlin to make their standard of living tolerable.

The following Communist moves immediately preceded the current tense situation. Throughout the first half of August, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, in various documents or through Khrushchev's speeches, deliberately fostered a war-scare in the Soviet Union. On August 3, Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko handed U. S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Llewellyn E. Thompson, a reply to the U. S. note of July 17. In conformity with the tactics of surprise and varied propaganda laid down as a model in the Soviet Communist Party's new draft program, the Soviet note attempted to sway public opinion in the neutral

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propaganda emphasis on the U. S. threat in Asia was an attempt to direct the attention of the Soviet people, as well as of other peoples, to another part of the world.

The Soviets appear to have reached an impasse in their German policy. The tough stand taken by the Allies and the anxiety of the Soviet people will force the Kremlin leaders to negotiate with the West in an attempt to emerge from the affair with peace and honor. Will the West be capable to profit from this situation?

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countries and in the Soviet Union by inventing the following situation in Western Germany:

If to the war-material resources of the German Federal Republic we add the militarist and revanchist spirit which, as it did a quarter of a century ago, penetrates all pores of government and public life in Western Germany, the extent of the danger engendered by the present developments in the German Federal Republic becomes plain. . . . The people of Western Germany live in a setting where revanchist passions are given free reign (Pravda, August 5, 1961).

Baiting the West, the note expressed the Soviet Union's willingness "to eliminate differences of opinion on the German question and its anxiety to restore co-operative relations with the U. S. A. for the good of the world. . . . The Soviet Government reaffirms that it is ready to negotiate" (ibid.).

The note emphasized the Soviet rejection of All-German free elections as an act of self-determination by the German people, and dismissed the idea of reunification:

The manipulation of the German nation by the slogan of self-determination, while there exist two independent German states, is a very cheap technique. . . . There neither are nor will be any prospects of the two German states' reaching agreement on reunification (ibid.).

Here the Soviet leaders contradicted their former proposals on the conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany. In August 1953, the Kremlin's major requirement was that Germany be restored as a single state and one of the first steps toward this goal was to be "the formation of a Provisional All-German Government and the holding of All-German elections" (Pravda, August 17, 1953).

The Soviet Government has frequently denied any intention to interfere in the internal affairs of the two German states or to promote changes in the social system of West Berlin. The note of August 3, however, stated that the conclusion of a peace treaty with the German Democratic Republic would be "a beacon to show the whole German people the way to a life of peace in conditions of complete sovereignty and independence, a way to the solution of their common national tasks." In Soviet doubletalk this means

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the neutralization and disarmament of West Germany to weaken the defensive power of NATO, and the gradual political assimilation of the "free" portion of Berlin,

The next stage in the artificial aggravation of the German problem was marked by the Conference of Communist Party First Secretaries from the Warsaw Pact countries, held in Moscow from August 3 to 5, 1961. The report on this conference, published on August 6, maintains that Soviet Central European policy is decided jointly by the Party leaders of the satellite countries--clearly a Soviet attempt to shake off sole responsibility for ensuing developments.

The next stage in the development of Soviet policy came with Khrushchev's radio and television speech, in which he warned that war would be brought into the homes of the American people. Nor, Khrushchev added, would it simply be a duel between the two giants since the Soviet Union would be compelled "not only to strike against the territory of the U. S. A., but also to neutralize the aggressor's allies and smash the U. S. military bases scattered about the world" (Pravda, August 8, 1961). Khrushchev announced that troops might be brought up to man the western borders and that a partial mobilization of reservists might be ordered. However, he also baited the hook:

Should the Western powers have any commitments or amendments to the draft of our peace treaty, or any suggestion of their own on this matter, we are prepared not only to hear them out but even to discuss all their considerations scrupulously. We have not the slightest desire to infringe upon the Western powers' just interests (ibid.).

The culminating point of deliberate Soviet aggravation was reached in Khrushchev's speech at the Soviet-Rumanian friendship meeting in the Kremlin Grand Palace on August 8. Cynically and brutally Khrushchev threatened that, in the event of war, the Soviet Union would be forced to

... strike crushing blows both against the territory of the major countries and also against those military bases situated in other countries which are members of the North Atlantic bloc. And, you know, military bases are not in a desert. In Italy, so to speak, they are situated among the citrus orchards and in Greece among the olive groves.... Cherish no illusions. A future thermonuclear war, should it be unleashed, will make no distinction between front and rear (Pravda, August 12, 1961).

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At approximately the same time, the Soviet leaders made another symbolic move. Marshal Konev, who for health reasons had been deprived of his post as Commander of the Warsaw Pact armed forces for over a year, was appointed commander of a "separate group of Soviet forces" stationed in East Germany; according to the Neue Zürcher Zeitung, the appointment became known in the West after Yakubovsky and Konev received the U.S., British and French Berlin commanders at Potsdam on August 10. This appointment of the Soviet Union's second most popular World War II general was obviously a gesture aimed at the West and a prelude to subsequent harsh measures. Three days later, on August 13, West Berlin was encircled by the Volkspolizei, tanks and East German troops. The next day the Soviet leaders hastened to waive responsibility for the action; all Soviet newspapers carried an obviously prearranged statement by the governments of the Warsaw Pact countries which appealed to the parliament (Volkskammer) and the government of the German Democratic Republic and to all the workers in the Republic "to set up controls on the border of West Berlin which will effectively prevent subversive activities against the countries of the socialist bloc" (Pravda, August 14, 1961).

The "statement" was plainly a Soviet fabrication since no meetings had been held between the East European governments during the period. The last conference of Party secretaries of these countries, held in the first few days of August, had no authority to adopt "governmental" decisions. The hasty publication of such a document clearly indicates the intense nervousness prevalent in Soviet ruling circles at this time. This feeling is also evident in the lack of co-ordination in the current press coverage of the German problem. Realizing that they had overplayed the policy of deliberate aggravation, the Soviet leaders urgently started to reduce the tension which they had created. Khrushchev left for a vacation in Sochi - a most unlikely venture during an international crisis. The Soviet newspapers vied with each other in giving deceptive accounts of settled and peaceful conditions in both sections of Berlin and in the Eastern Zone:

Today is a normal working day in Berlin. As always, early in the morning the workers arrived at their machines and the office workers set off for their companies. . . . The people of West Berlin have kept calm and evince a sober understanding of the protective measures carried out by the authorities of the German Democratic Republic and dictated by necessity (Pravda, August 15, 1961).

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These distorted reports were made necessary by the growth among the Soviet populace of trends which had no part in the Soviet leaders' plans or wishes. At the various Soviet social levels there has been a marked difference between the official line and the true feelings of the people. Directly after Khrushchev's television speech, all Soviet munitions factories, had to hold mass meetings, at which the workers unanimously agreed to ask the government to allow them to work eight hours a day instead of the normal seven, or even longer "should the country require it."

In the next few days similar reports flooded in from the Urals, Siberia and other parts of the Soviet Union. The technique of artificially inciting "public opinion" was also extended to all units of the Red Army.

Extension of this campaign to the younger generation presented much more difficulty. The Komsomol Central Committee therefore took upon itself the task of "vouching" for Soviet youth's reliability and love of the Party and government, its confidence in Soviet policy and its readiness to defend the country to the last drop of blood:

The Central Committee of the All-Union Komsomol is quite confident that Komsomol members--young men and women--will show energy, tenacity and steady faith in the justice of our cause, . . . Soviet youth solemnly swears to the Party and the people that, at the first call from the Party, it will rise to the defense of the country, the peaceful labor and the happiness of the Soviet people. It swears that it will devote all its strength and energy and, if needs be, its life in the defense of the great gains of socialism (Pravda, August 9, 1961).

The Soviet press shows, however, that the Soviet younger generation has quite a different attitude to the alternative of war with the West. In a recent issue of Yunost (Youth), a Soviet teacher describes the mood of some 16-year-old boys. She writes:

Ned wrote about Remarque. Well, and what of it? Many people have written about Remarque. His books are thought-provoking. But here is what Ned wrote: "All we young people fear war. We hate it and we fear it. We want to live--to drink wine and kiss girls, dance in lighted rooms and walk in floodlit

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streets. That is why I like All Quiet on the Western Front. It shows what a dreadful thing war is; I fear war and do not want it." He wrote a competent and intelligent essay. "What do you want life to be?" I asked Ned. "Like it is in the West," he replied (Yunost, No. 7, 1961).

If members of the Soviet younger generation can openly express such opinions and have them published by a leading Soviet youth journal, it would seem that "pacifism" is characteristic of a large proportion of Soviet youth. Faced with this attitude the Soviet leaders are compelled to devise new and more subtle didoes in their propaganda.

Endeavoring to find a way out of their difficulties, Soviet politicians have in recent weeks tried to foster a hostile attitude toward the United States and the other Western powers among the nations in Africa and Asia even though they may be allied with the West. In Japan, for instance, Mikoyan, persistently harped on the danger to the Japanese of a defense treaty between Japan and the United States. Japan, he said, would be annihilated as an American ally should World War III develop from the Berlin situation. Recently the Soviet leaders "disclosed" sinister American and British plans for their CENTO allies and other neutral countries of Asia, which would have large areas of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey covered with nuclear bombs on the first day of war to create a kind of "death belt" on the southern borders of the USSR. Neutral Afghanistan, they alleged, was also scheduled for destruction. The Soviet aim, of course, was to distract world attention from Soviet actions in Berlin and foster suspicion among the neutral countries as to West's true intentions in the Berlin and German question.

The Soviet leaders have reached an impasse in their German policy and have virtually lost the initiative and their control of events. Their use of the bogey of war to try to restore unity of opinion before the Twenty-second Soviet Communist Party Congress aroused alarm and unrest among the people of East Berlin and East Germany and touched off the mass flight to the West, clearly demonstrating the political bankruptcy of the Ulbricht regime.

The mass emigration compelled the Soviet leaders to seal off West Berlin--a move which, in turn, alarmed the Germans, provoked the Western powers to improve their combat readiness, and aroused the anxiety of the Soviet population to a quite unexpected degree. This situation must inevitably force the Soviet leaders to negotiate with the West in an attempt to emerge from the affair with peace and honor. The question is: Will Western diplomacy prove itself capable of profiting from the situation?